

5031 Varna Avenue,
Sherman Oaks, Calif. 91403
October 11, 1965

Joseph P. Hehn,
915 North 7th Street,
Lebanon, Pa. 17042.

Dear Mr. Hehn:

Blanche Baker, of The Writers Guild of America, West, has contacted me regarding your inquiry concerning the authorship of the radio version of The Gumps.

Yes, I wrote either 39 or 52 weeks of this 5-a-week 15-minute serial around 1937 or 1938. (I'm sorry, but I was involved in so many radio shows around that time that I'm a little vague about dates and the length of time the series lasted.)

The Gumps was hardly a juvenile adventure radio serial, however. (That, I gather from your letter, is the type of show you're trying to track down.) It was a radio adaptation of the daily newspaper cartoon strip of the same period, and would be defined as comedy. It was produced and directed by Mr. Himan Brown, who is still active in New York TV production, and who could be reached, I'm sure, through the production departments of NBC or CBS in New York. He also produced a large number of other daily radio shows in which you might be interested. If you have difficulty in locating him, write me at the above address and I'm sure I can help you.

I was also the writer of Popeye the Sailor -- which ran for 13 weeks, I believe, on CBS -- and can give you information on that, if you wish. I was also connected with many other radio shows on which you might need some facts --

2 - MR. JOSEPH HEHN.

these including The Fred Allen Show on which I was a staff writer in 1938, 1939, and 1940; The James Melton Show, which I wrote from 1940 to 1943; "Easy Aces", on which I occasionally collaborated with Goodman Ace around 1937 and 1938; "Millions For Defense", a weekly one-hour show on CBS -- later on NBC -- which was put on by Texaco for The Treasury Department (other writers, including Herman Wouk, were also involved in this one); and -- among many others, -- a weekly sustaining comedy show on ABC around 1935 to 1938 called "Fishface and Figgssbottle" which I wrote and on which I also performed.

I may be able to help you, if you're interested, in information on other radio shows of the 1930 to 1945 period, for I was connected with a great many of them in that golden age of New York and Hollywood radio.

It occurs to me that a good friend of mine, Jack Hasty, might also be of assistance. He wrote, I know, a number of episodes of "The Shadow", and many other network shows of the same period I've mentioned above. If he can be of help, his address is 12222 Otsego Street, North Hollywood, California.

Good luck on your history of the Juvenile Adventure Radio Serials. I'm looking forward to reading it.

Sincerely


DON JOHNSON *

*In many cases, particularly in serious dramatic shows, I used the name D. H. Johnson; if you run across that credit anywhere, it's mine, too.

P.S. Another bit of information on The Gumps which has just come to mind: The character of "Min" was played by Agnes Moorehead, since more famous, and "Andy" was Wilmer Walter, now deceased. In another period when The Gumps was on the air -- prior to my connection with it, -- the writer was Irwin Shaw, now renowned as a novelist.

Don Johnson
5031 Varna Avenue,
Sherman Oaks, California. 91403

Mr. Joseph P. Hehn,
915 North 7th Street,
Lebanon, Pa. 17042.



915 North 7th Street
Lebanon, Pa. 17042
October 29, 1965

Mr. Don Johnson
5031 Varna Avenue
Sherman Oaks, California 91403

Dear Mr. Johnson:

It is a pleasure and a privilege to hear from you, and I must beg your forgiveness for the delay in answering. As you can guess I am swamped with work. Actually I should be in bed right now as it is rather late and I am ill, but I was just rereading your interesting and gracious letter and I decided to answer you tonight.

I do not know how much Blanche told you about my research so let me bring you up to date.

I am researching and writing the definitive History of the Juvenile Adventure Radio Serials in cooperation with the Broadcast Pioneers, who, under William S. Hedges (in New York), is compiling all material relating to the history of Broadcasting. I have conferred at great length with Bill Hedges, Ed Dunham, M. H. Shapiro, Donald Mercer (NBC), Harry Bannister (NBC), George Perkins (CBS), Joseph Keating (MUTUAL) and Drex Hines (RCA), among others. We believe that this history will be an important part of and contribution to the History of Broadcasting.

The accompanying outlines will indicate the important serials my research has unearthed during the past twenty-two months, the purposes of our history and some idea of how it is divided.

Obviously most of the shows you mentioned do not come under my topic. However, do not let that dissuade you from writing about them. To help you out I am including one of my serial questionnaires; most of these questions can be applied to any type program. If you find time to pass along any information or material relevant to the shows you were associated with, I would be delighted if you would send it on to me since I have a great interest in all the old shows. Although my present task is more than enough to keep me busy, I would love to read over the material on your shows before passing it on to Bill Hedges at the Pioneers in New York.

Mr. Don Johnson

(2)

October 29, 1965

The shows you were associated with certainly were some of the finest. I am sorry that you missed a discussion on WOR radio about the old radio shows and their relative merits. This discussion occurred last Saturday morning from midnight to 5:30 and featured Joe Franklin of WOR-TV, Arthur Tracy--the Street Singer and Arnolda former writer on the FRED ALLEN show who recently wrote a book called, FUNNYMEN DON'T LAUGH. The most obscure member of the panel was yours truly. We spent quite some time discussing Fred Allen and his show, as well as many of the other greats, including the adventure serials, which, I believe I proved were great in their own way.

I believe I mentioned Agnes Moorehead being on the GUMPS and of course we talked about her tremendous performance in SORRY, WRONG NUMBER. I remember that I emphasized the fact that so very many of the great stars of today got their start on radio. I really enjoyed doing the show.

Blanche Baker and I are still encountering difficulty in locating some of the writers of my serials. I will mention some of them later on; perhaps you can help me out here.

One final point and then I must close. I am wondering if you know Nelson Olmsted who lives on Magnolia Boulevard in Sherman Oaks. Nelson has been very kind to me and done his utmost to help out. Please give him my kindest regards if you know him.

I cannot say enough for the generosity of the people in California. Most whom I have contacted have responded very kindly. I feel kind of sad that my dear old Notre Dame manhandled California so badly; so tomorrow I will be hoping that they can upset Penn State.

Suggestions concerning any phase of my research are always more than welcome.

Again, thank you for your kindness.

Sincerely yours,

Joseph P. Hehn

5031 Varna Avenue,
Sherman Oaks, California. 91403
November 9, 1965

Joseph P. Hehn,
915 North 7th Street,
Lebanon, Pa. 17042

Dear Mr. Hehn:

Thanks for your letter of October 29, apologies for the delay in answering it, and admiring applause for the work you are doing in researching and writing a history of the juvenile adventure radio serials. (Incidentally, I have just read an article in LIFE, November 12 issue, called "A Nostalgic Stroll Up Allen's Alley" -- recordings of Fred Allen's shows, to be broadcast on NBC November 14 -- by Sam Moore. A footnote states that Mr. Moore is currently writing a book to be called "The Great Old Days of Radio.")

I'm sorry I didn't know about (and couldn't have heard) the panel discussion on WOR in which you participated with Arnold Auerbach, among others. Arnold was a writer on the Fred Allen show at the time I was a similar member of the assembly line. Herman Wouk -- related to Arnold, by the way -- was also on the staff.

As to your questions, I'm genuinely sorry, but I'm not going to be much help on your History of the Juvenile Adventure Serials. I never had any connections with any of them (as I said in my first letter, the only serials I wrote were THE GUMPS and POPEYE, plus some collaboration with Goodman Ace on EASY ACES) and rarely listened to them, so I can't tell you anything about them. In my earlier letter, I suggested that you contact Himan Brown, who produced and directed many daily serials, including some in the classification you're researching. He's probably in the New York (Manhattan) telephone directory; the last time I was in New York, he lived on Central Park West, somewhere in the 70's or 80's, and probably is still there.

You mentioned Nelson Olmstead, who apparently lives somewhere near me. Sorry, I don't know him, though his name is familiar to me.

You enclosed one of your serial questionnaires, with the suggestion that I translate the questions to relate to shows with which I was connected. Honestly, this would take

2 Joseph P. Hehn

so much time that I hesitate to undertake it unless it is specifically needed by Bill Hedges. (I'm still writing for a living, and I have to conserve my energy these days.) However, I'd be glad to answer questions about the aspects of radio in which I participated, if Mr. Hedges wants further information. Briefly, these are some of the highlights of my inglorious career:

Started in radio as combination operator and announcer at KGCL, a 50 watt station in Seattle, in 1927.* Began writing commercials and comedy material (I seemed to have some talent for the latter) shortly after. Became full-time script writer around 1929, on staffs of Seattle stations KVI, KJR and KOMO. Wrote first radio drama using stream-of-consciousness device, "Drink Deep," produced on NBC Pacific Coast Network in 1930 (and subsequently re-broadcast over NBC national network as an historic first around 1940.)

Joined Al Pearce and his Gang -- a daily one-hour variety show on NBC -- in 1933, as a writer. Show traveled and played theatres; when it took me to New York, I left it to write a once-a-week comedy show, originally called "Design For Listening" on old NBC Blue Network from New York. Performed on this show -- which somehow lasted 122 weeks without getting a sponsor -- in the character of "Professor Figgsbottle," a fuddy-duddy fellow who gave little lectures on birds, bees and such. Simultaneously wrote for various other shows -- THE GUMPS, POPEYE and EASY ACES collaboration, plus spots on variety shows -- and performed the Figgsbottle act elsewhere, including Rudy Vallee Show. Wrote for Fred Allen, 1938-1940; then joined Buchanan and Co., a New York advertising agency, to do the Fred Allen commercials for Texaco. Wrote summer replacement shows, these starring Jane Froman and James Melton, then collaborated on "Millions For Defense," broadcast during war years for Treasury Department. In 1945 left New York to come to Hollywood and write a three-times-weekly show starring Alan Reed as "Falstaff Openshaw." (He was the tramp poet of the Fred Allen "Allen's Alley", and I'd written some of the poems -- if they were that -- he used on Fred's show.)

In Hollywood, in addition to Falstaff Openshaw, I collaborated on The Charlotte Greenwood Show, did some writing on a thing called Hollywood Calling, and worked now and then on other shows, both comedy and dramatic, until radio began to die out and I got into other fields.

*The asterisk above refers to what may be an historic first. At KGCL -- which later became KPQ -- the management decided to keep the station on the air all night. I became

3 Joseph P. Hehn

the first all-night disc jockey in the west -- and perhaps in the nation, though I can't prove it. (Of course, the term "disc jockey" hadn't been invented then, nor had the abbreviation "DJ" ... though, by an odd coincidence the initials are the same as mine.)

Reading over the above, I perceive that I'm wandering into "old-man" reminiscences that are bound to become boring. If I can help you more specifically in any of the areas I've touched upon, let me know.

Good luck

Don Johnson
DON JOHNSON

P.S. It has occurred to me that a couple of actors who worked regularly on the Fred Allen Show are now out here. They're ALAN REED and CHARLEY CANTOR, who might fill you in on other shows as well, since both worked on many of the daily serials. Alan Reed (who is still active in radio and TV commercials, plus the voice of "Fred Flintstone" in the TV animated cartoon series, "The Flintstones," and much TV and stage work) lives at 1455 Queens Road, Los Angeles 46. Charley Cantor isn't seen quite so frequently, but is still active; I don't have his address, but Alan Reed probably can give it to you if you write him.

P.P.S. I'm returning some of the sheets you sent me. You may want to use them elsewhere and this might save re-typing.

915 North 7th Street
Lebanon, Pa. 17042
December 2, 1965

Mr. Don Johnson
5031 Varna Avenue
Sherman Oaks, California 91403

Dear Mr. Johnson:

Thank you for your very interesting and informative letter of November 9. Your "old-man" reminiscences are certainly not boring to me.

Your career is indeed a distinguished one and I am sorry that I am not writing about the shows you were associated with. However, I feel that the juvenile adventure serials are more interesting than any other segment of radio.

I also noticed that article in Life and I am trying to locate Mr. Moore through my contacts at NBC. I hope that he is not covering too much of my territory, and perhaps he can help me out. Actually by the time I finish I should have enough for several volumes.

Please forgive me for imposing on you with the questionnaire. I hope to see Bill Hedges after the New Year, and if not, I will send him your summary. I know that he will be delighted to have it and will be most interested in learning more details.

It was a great joy reminiscing with Arnold Auerbach. Arnold lives in the same building with Himan Brown. This past summer I had talked with Himan by phone, and have written him several times since I know that he directed thousands of shows including many of my key serials. But Himan has simply refused to cooperate, and Arnold remarked that 'it's pretty difficult to win him over to your side. I can't say enough about Arnold, though, because he went overboard to praise my efforts and accomplishments in this most difficult field--and all this over the air, which was somewhat embarrassing.

I recently wrote to Alan Reed as you suggested.

Continued success in your endeavors.

Sincerely yours,

Joe Hahn